JONATHAN HICKMAN • BRYAN HITCH • ANDREW CURRIE • ALEX SINCLAIR

ULTIMATE INVASION

MARVEL

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The Funeral of Obadiah Stane.

I'm sorry, Dad.

This is just so terrible.

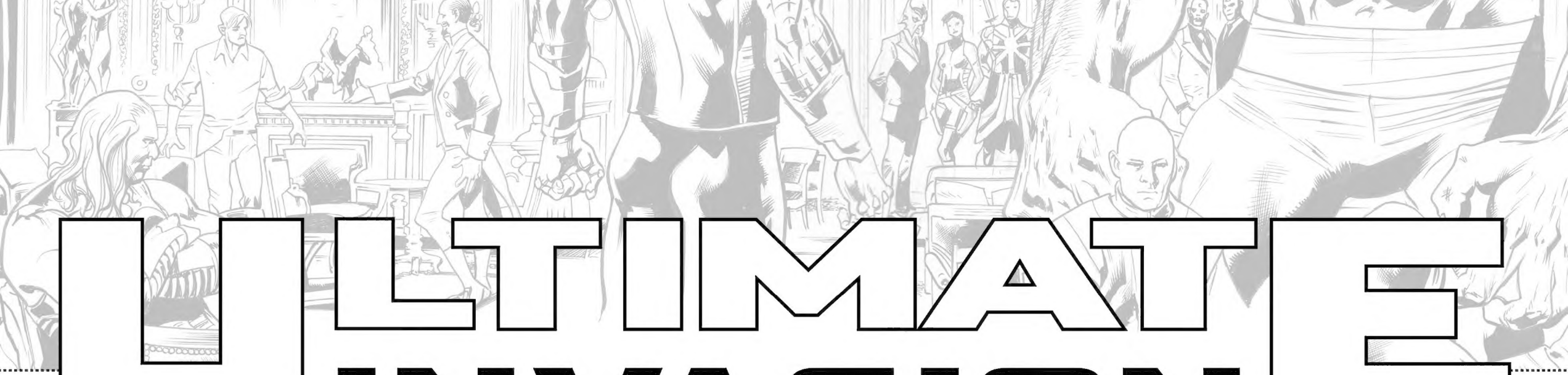
Here lies OBADIAH STANE

Sigh. It certainly is.

Sleep well, old friend.

...
What are you going to do now?
Tony, how would you feel if I told you to pack your bags because we're getting on the plane and running away to live a very quiet, very small, very peaceful life?
Sounds amazing. And I'd love to say yes, but we both know that's not going to happen, is it?
No. It's not.
I saw the attack on the feed, but then they cut all coverage--*it was a total blackout*. Nothing for an entire day. Then you just showed up--back home with Obadiah's body.
What happened, Dad?
What happened in *Latveria?*

CHAPTER THREE: "THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS"



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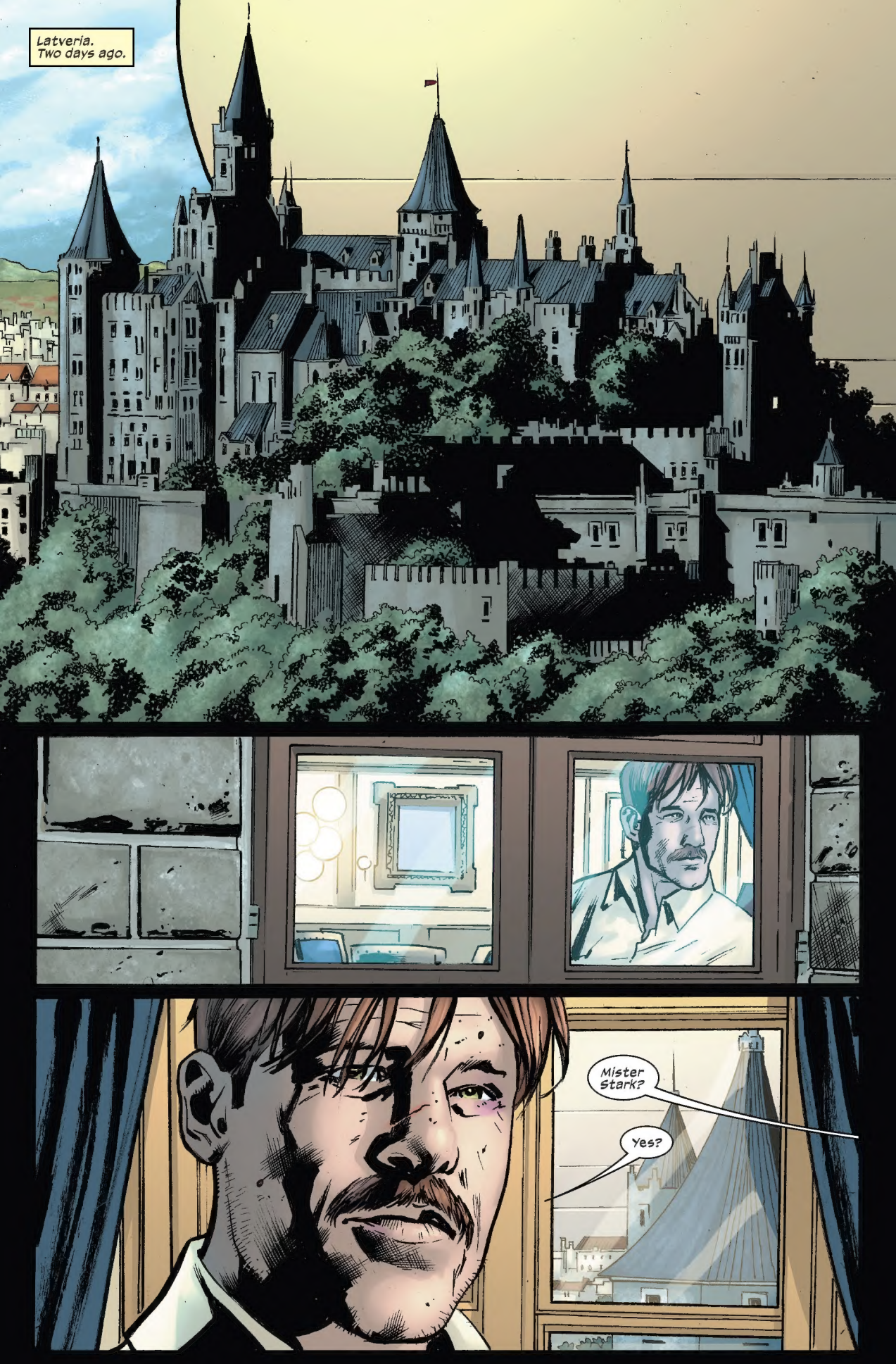

Latveria.
Two days ago.
Mister Stark?
Yes?

I wanted to welcome you and introduce myself...

I am *Emmanuel Da Costa.*

I have to say, I've followed your work for years.

Unfortunate that it happens under these circumstances, but it's still a pleasure to meet you.

Thank you. Nice to meet you as well.
Feeling a bit out of place?
I recognize the names and some of the faces, but as you know, Obadiah normally handled all of these "*higher-level*" get-togethers.
I wasn't concerned, as I'm normally pretty good in the room, but I have to admit, I'm finding this one a bit cold.
I tried to introduce myself to *Yoshida* earlier but his samurai cut me off--*and by cut me off, I mean he literally showed me his blade.*
Ah. That's just *protocol,* my boy...
"One does not simply speak to the *Sun Emperor* when he is under the veil.
"When the mask comes off, you can converse with him like any other man, but until then, you should only communicate through his voice, the *Viper.*"
Which--*between you and me*--I find a good enough reason to wait.
You'll find some version of those same conventions when dealing with *Lords of the Upper and Lower Kingdoms.*

Ra only speaks when the sun is waxing and is silent when it wanes. The inverse is true for the full moon of Khonshu.
Ah. Here we go. Now here's a genial fellow.
Howard, this is Henri Dugarry.
Henri currently holds both the Sword of Might and the Amulet of Right, granting him providence over the entirety of the European Union.
Bonjour, Monsieur Stark. Quelle époque intéressante que celle dans laquelle nous nous trouvons.
Interesting is certainly a word for it.

And *discord* would be another.
Any word yet on what the purpose or meaning was behind today's attack?
I haven't heard a thing.
Nor have I, *Monsieur* Hulk.
... I just got here.
Yes. And I regret the events that have led you here, Mr. Stark.
And while I--*of course*--find such random violence unacceptable, I cannot help but notice that the intentional malice against this collective of ours implies a certain amount of planning and forethought.
Behind that, I suspect a desire to destabilize all that we have built--*a blow against our proactive, peaceful union.*
Should such mindless--*and pointless*--action prove to be the intent, well...
That would make me quite... angry.

Okay, let's hear it!!!
Who the hell attacked us today?
And where--*in that same hell he calls home*--is the ***Maker?*** We need to get on with this--*take action*--and make whoever that was ***regret being born.***
Une femme si colérique.
Definitely. But I'm honestly surprised you would meet with her or her companions.
Excuse-moi?
Whatever do you mean?
The ***Rasputins.*** They're the ***enemy.***

Did Obadiah not explain how any of this works to you?

From time to time he would ask if I wanted to know how the sausage was made. It never really interested me.

...

I see now maybe I should have listened.

I promise you, Mr. Stark, however it might appear to the world at large:

There are *no enemies* in *this room.*

What? I think you're forgetting the Eastern conflict? And that event in the Pacific? And what about the winter Apocalypse? *I could go on...*

Ask any man on the street and they would disagree. *As would history. As would I.*

That is the world as *you know it.*

Look around this place and you will see that there are seven major territories represented.

And though we have not yet fully circled this sun, when our time has come--*each of our nations will play...the "adversary."* Just as the *Rasputins* do now.

While inside our non-adversarial nations, we rally our citizens against this great evil, and all participate in whatever pageantry is required.
Then, at the end of a generation, another territory--one that has spent the previous age becoming more and more belligerent--assumes the "rogue state" mantle while the previous one engages in a generation of performative regret.
Around and around it goes. Focusing the citizens' eyes on external threats and away from any internal failures of their own territory--
--maintaining the illusion of peace in an illusory time of war.
The Maker is a pragmatic and visionary man. He believes this is good because it works. And it does work--so we accept it as the greater good.
...
My god...
That might be the most insidious thing I've ever heard.

Wait until you hear whose turn it is next.
What?
We'll get to that. But first, you need to understand there is a very good reason behind this.
Care to fathom a guess?
No. Not really.
The problem has been studied. The Maker did several iterations of experimental societies inside the City. He has shown us the results.
Peace--achieved, coerced or enforced--is never a successful long-term strategy.
The truth is...humanity is incapable of accepting it.
To be fair. Not all of us agree with such universal assumptions, Mr. Stark.
I believe that some people--many, even--are capable of achieving a state of inner calm that presents as peace. I have to believe it. I've devoted my life to it.

But most are incapable of maintaining *that state* in *perpetuity*.
They can't handle the *quiet*. They can't let their *action be inaction*. They can't maintain serenity with all the hysterical babbling that surrounds them.
I wish it wasn't true.
But *it is*...
...and always *has been*.

Of course, focusing on the shortcomings of mankind's nature makes it easier for those in this room to gloss over the other major reason we do this:
The little people hate us--we giants who rule the land.
It's not how it used to be in ages gone by. Back then it wouldn't have mattered--the powerful would just roll right over the powerless if need be. We could build an empire on their bones, if we wanted...
But now they are a *collective*--*instantaneously aware of just how many of them there are*--and how much they uniformly hate people like us.

Which is why it's necessary to give them something else to focus on.
Which we have gotten *very good* at *doing*.
I said I found all this insidious before you got here.
That might have been *too kind* a word.
Choose whatever word you wish. It won't change who they are and who you are...
Because you, Howard Stark--*rich, brilliant and powerful*--
--are *one of us*.

Doesn't feel that way.
But I do have one question.
Of course. Ask anything you want.
So if all this--*this well-choreographed dance of yours*--is to keep the people happy so that we can get on with the important work of what giants do...
...do you mind telling me exactly what that *real work* is?
Ah, Mister Stark...
Now we're *getting somewhere.*

THE WORLD

THE WORLD

AS REMADE BY THE MAKER

- THE NORTH AMERICAN UNION
- REGIONAL SUBSIDIARIES

- THE SOCIETY OF SOUTH AMERICA
- REGIONAL CLUBS
- FRACTIONAL CULTURES

- THE EUROPEAN COALITION
- REGIONAL GOVERNORS
- FIEFDOMS

- THE CITY
- LATVERIAN TERRITORIES

- THE UPPER AND LOWER KINGDOMS
- REGIONAL DYNASTIES
- LOCAL TEMPLES

- THE EURASIAN REPUBLIC
- REGIONAL DIRECTORS
- LOCAL SCHOOLS

- THE CHILDREN OF ETERNAL LIGHT
- THE SHADOWS OF THE IMMORTAL HAND

- HI NO KUNI ("LAND OF FIRE")
- DAIMYOS

- UNDISCOVERED TERRITORY

1963-2023

NOW.
Ten minutes back to the tower, sir.
The jet is on standby.
Thanks.

So what are you going to do, Dad?
Too many variables for a definitive answer, son.
The scale of it. The appetite of those people. The inhumanity masquerading as cold logic. I just don't know...
You got any bright ideas?
...
I think you should *fight them.*
Some people might say that would be us proving their exact point.
And then there's the small matter of "*I might lose.*"
There's right and wrong, Dad. And this is *wrong.*
No, it's worse. Because you're mistaking right and wrong for good and evil.

Do you really think Obadiah knew?
I don't know...
I'd like to pretend that he didn't know and he was the guy I always thought he was.
I'll probably never get a real answer to that. I'm not sure I want one.
What?
You should fight them.
And win.

Listen, son...I'm still processing what I've learned...
I have some ideas, but I'm still getting to the edges of where I might start...
So give your old man a couple weeks before you really start being disappointed in me, okay?
Dad...
...you know I can help.
Anthony, the point of the exercise--the reason why I would even want to fight and win--is so you can outlive us all.
But I promise, if I need you, I'll let you know.
Okay.

Dad?
Yeah?
Be careful.
That's not how it works, Son...
Careful doesn't come with winning.

The City.
One day ago.
Where are we?
You've never been inside the City, correct?
You know I haven't.
Actually, I don't know that...

...but right now, I'd rather not dwell on my current shortcomings. *As to where you are...*

This is the darkest corner of the deepest section of the city--it's a prison, *really.*

A place where some ***truly genius*** work is done.

It's also where all my nightmares reside.

But for now, however, it will serve as your lab.

For this is where you're going to build the ***Immortus Engine...***

And now I want to introduce you to your assistant--*I think you'll find him useful.*

I work alone.

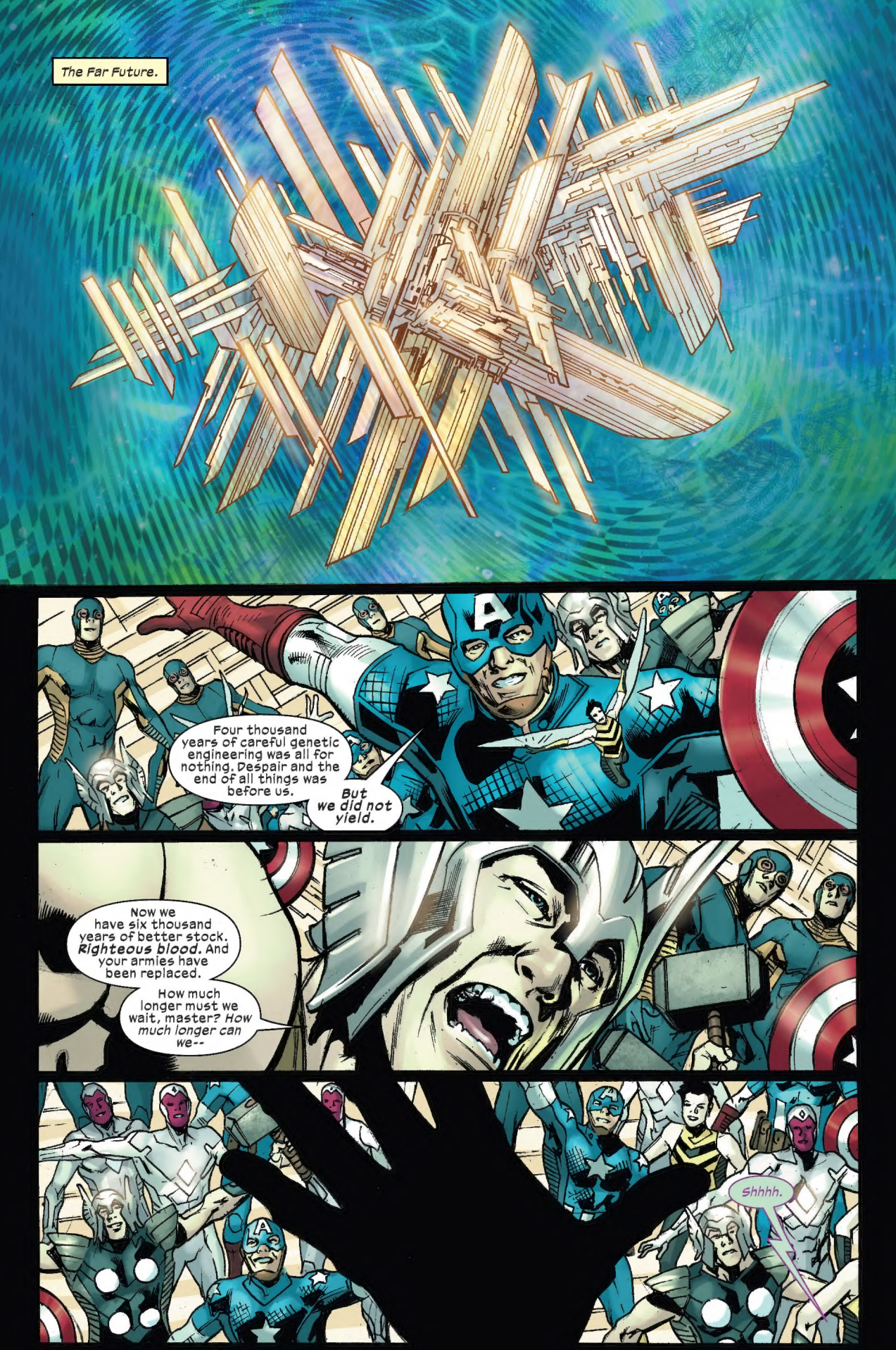
No one works alone. We carry the ghosts of our successes and failures--*who we could have been, who we should have been--* and they haunt us for all our days.

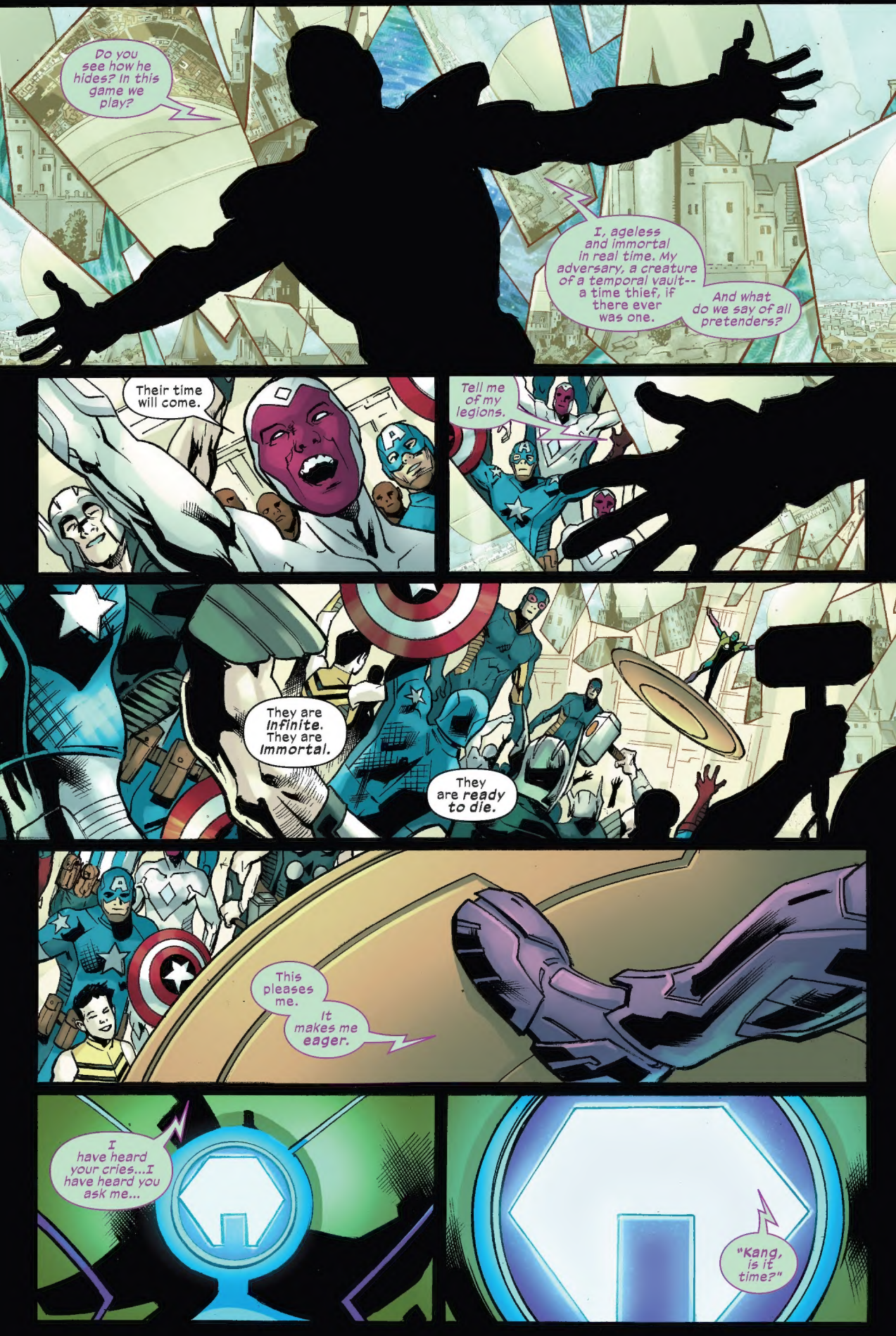
Howard Stark, I'd like for you to meet ***Reed Richards.***

Some say he's the smartest man in the universe. *And I have to say...*

...I do agree.

EPILOGUE:
"ALL TOMORROW'S ARMIES"


The Far Future.
Four thousand years of careful genetic engineering was all for nothing. Despair and the end of all things was before us.
But we did not yield.
Now we have six thousand years of better stock. Righteous blood. And your armies have been replaced.
How much longer must we wait, master? How much longer can we--
Shhhh.


Do you see how he hides? In this game we play?
I, ageless and immortal in real time. My adversary, a creature of a temporal vault-- a time thief, if there ever was one.
And what do we say of all pretenders?
Their time will come.
Tell me of my legions.
They are *infinite*. They are *immortal*.
They are *ready to die*.
This pleases me.
It makes me *eager*.
I have heard your cries...I have heard you ask me...
"Kang, is it time?"

And so I tell you truly...
The time is now.
TO BE CONCLUDED...